

English 110.017: Some Terms for Analysing Poetry

The summary notes for our class lectures on poetry all contain examples of the particular devices we discussed during those classes. This handout collects many of the terms that we have been using into one place, with examples from the class reading.

alliteration: repetition of initial consonants in sequence of nearby words; see also *consonance*

Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

assonance: repetition of similar vowel sounds in sequence of nearby words

Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

blank verse: verse that does not rhyme, but with regular metre; most often, blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter (an example is Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*)

caesura: strong pause or break within poetic line

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call, | | and came: | | and Guinevere

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

consonance: repetition of consonant sounds in nearby words; see also *alliteration*

The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

end-stopped: a line is end-stopped if pause in reading (end of syntactic unit) coincides with end of line of verse; all of the lines in this example are end-stopped

And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

enjambment: a line shows enjambment if sense carries over end of line of verse into next line (also called *run-on* line); all of the lines in this example run on

... Horses screamed like cats, and men
ran through their own dust like darks howling. My country
went up in flames to the last rick and roof, and the smoke
was my own breath in me scorching the world bare.

(John Ciardi, *Lancelot in Hell*)

The effect is also present in rhyming verse, as this example shows

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

(Robert Browning, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*)

feminine rhyme: a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable at the end of a line of verse; see also *masculine rhyme*

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of **fumbling**
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and **stumbling**
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime. –

(Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*)

free verse: verse with no regular metre or rhyme scheme to give it structure (an example is John Ciardi's *Lancelot in Hell*)

iambic pentameter: a poetic meter consisting of five metrical feet, dominated by iambic stress

And **hold** | their **man** | hoods **cheap** | whiles **an** | y **speaks**
That fought | with **us** | upon | Saint **Cris** | pin's **day**.

(William Shakespeare, *Henry V*)

masculine rhyme: single stressed syllable at the end of line of verse

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, **met**
To view the last of me, a living **frame**
For one more picture! in a sheet of **flame**
I saw them and I knew them all. And **yet**
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I **set**

(Robert Browning, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*)

metaphor: a word or expression denoting one thing literally, applied to another thing without making the comparison explicit (that is, without using “like” or “as”; see also *simile*)

I fed the best meat in England to carrion crows

(John Ciardi, *Lancelot in Hell*)

metonymy: literal term for one thing applied to another with which it is usually associated, eg., “the crown” for a ruler

meter: structure of rhythm of stresses into recurrence of regular units

onomatopoeia: word whose sound closely resembles word it denotes: there are several examples in these lines

Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shattered helmets, and shrieks
After the Christ

(Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*)

personification: occurs when inanimate object or abstract concept is spoken of as if endowed with human attributes; also called *prosopopoeia*

Droll rate, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.

(Isaac Rosenberg, *Break of Day in the Trenches*)

simile: comparison between two different things using **like** or **as**

Bent double, **like** old beggars under sacks

(Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*)

stress: scansion is the process of marking stress in a line of poetry, and dividing that line into feet (metrical units). The main feet are

iamb: ~ / (a**way**) [this is the most common foot in English]

trochee: / ~ (**lovely**)

anapest: ~ ~ / (under**stand**)

dactyl: / ~ ~ (**desperate**)

spondee: / / (**dead set**)